America's Security Challenges Require a New Division of Labor Among the Armed Forces

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The ongoing debate over the war in Iraq; the on-again, off-again attention given to North Korea's nuclear weapon program; and heightened concern over China's military modernization efforts, including its recent test of an antisatellite system, highlight the very different, and very diverse, security challenges the United States is facing in the early years of a new century.

These challenges and a strategy for confronting them are the subjects of a new RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) study that focuses on meeting U.S. security challenges beyond Iraq. The study explores America's roles in the world, the challenges confronting America's security, and the responsibilities of the armed forces in contending with these challenges.

A Daunting Set of Challenges

The challenges radical Islam poses are certainly prominent in the American security debate, but they are by no means the only threats to U.S. security. This study focuses on three prominent security challenges that will dominate America's future security landscape:

- **Terrorist and insurgent groups.** By harnessing militant interpretations of Islam to new means of violence, al Qaeda and related groups have created a virulent threat that all responsible states must act to defeat.
- **Regional powers with nuclear weapons.** North Korea and Iran appear determined to acquire nuclear weapons, and North Korea seems to have succeeded. The United States must posture its armed forces to deter and defeat aggression while it pursues political initiatives aimed at helping these societies evolve toward more democratic systems of government, stability, and integration into regional security structures.
- **Security competition in Asia.** With its burgeoning economy and growing tech-

Abstract

Effectively addressing emerging threats, including those that Islamist terrorist groups, nuclear-armed regional adversaries, and enemy forces equipped to conduct sophisticated "antiaccess" operations pose, will require significant changes in the way major elements of America's armed forces are equipped, trained, and deployed.

nological sophistication, China is fielding an impressive set of capabilities that can be used to impede U.S. forces from coming to the support of its partners in the region. The challenge here, again, is to couple an appropriate military posture with long-term efforts to integrate China into the international system as a stable, responsible power.

Meeting These Challenges

These developments have distinct implications for U.S. strategists. A substantial and sustained effort to suppress terrorist and insurgent groups is essential if the United States is to make headway against the threats they pose. For the Department of Defense (DoD), this will sometimes take the form of direct action to locate and to capture or kill terrorists and insurgents. Far more often, it will involve indirect actions, principally long-term, "hands-on" efforts to train, equip, advise, and assist the forces of nations that seek to suppress these groups in their own territories. At the same time, but certainly no less challenging, U.S. forces must ensure that they can defend against threats from states possessing nuclear weapons and overcome modern "antiaccess" weapons and methods.

These demands will stress U.S. armed forces both qualitatively (by creating needs for new

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Effectively addressing emerging threats including those that Islamist terrorist groups nuclear-armed regional adversaries and enemy forces equipped to conduct sophisticated ?antiaccess? operations pose will require signifi cant changes in the way major elements of America?s armed forces are equipped, trained, and deployed.

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types of capabilities) and quantitatively (calling for high and sustained levels of commitment abroad), while fiscal realities will place strict limits on the resources available. How might these competing pressures be reconciled?

Recasting U.S. Defense Strategy

DoD first needs to define a defense strategy that embraces the goal of extending democracy and freedom, although not in the ways that were attempted in Iraq. This means greatly increasing the emphasis on helping to create or enhance stability in key areas abroad.

To that end, the force-sizing criterion posited by the 2004 defense strategy and refined in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review should be further recast. The old "1-4-2-1" criterion calls for armed forces to be prepared simultaneously to defend the United States (1), deter aggression and coercion in four critical regions (4), and swiftly defeat aggression in two overlapping conflicts (2), while preserving the option to impose a change of regime in one of the conflicts (1). In reality, however, the number of places in which U.S. and allied forces might need to promote stability and democracy is indeterminate. "4" has, therefore, become "n." At the same time, the familiar missions of deterring and defeating aggression through large-scale power-projection operations remain important. The question becomes whether and how DoD can support a demanding "1-n-2-1" criterion for sizing and shaping the armed forces of the United States.

A New Division of Labor

The demands of "1-n-2-1" need not, and indeed should not, apply equally to every branch of the armed forces. The imperative to promote stability and democracy abroad will place the greatest demands on the Army, the Marine Corps, and special operations forces (SOF). The most plausible regional wars that U.S. forces might be called on to fight—involving Iran, China (over Taiwan), and North Korea—call for heavy commitments of air and naval forces and, in the first two cases, fewer U.S. ground forces.

DoD should consider focusing a much larger proportion of U.S. ground forces on direct and indirect stability operations and accept the risk of shifting some of the burden for deterring and defeating large-scale aggression to air and naval forces. This decision would permit the Army and Marine
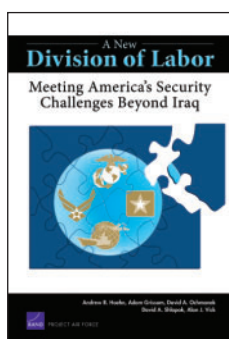
Corps, in conjunction with SOF, to improve their stability-operations capabilities by relieving them of the requirement to provide forces for more than one major "conventional" war. The Navy and Air Force would retain their primary focus on large-scale power-projection operations and would continue to provide essential enabling capabilities for direct and indirect stability operations.

Potential Actions

The foregoing considerations suggest that DoD's leaders should bring America's defense capabilities into better alignment with the nation's broader goals. Potential actions include the following:

- **Recast U.S. defense strategy to incorporate "1-n-2-1" as its force-sizing construct,** thus allowing the Army and Marine Corps to focus more on stability, counter-terrorism, and counterinsurgency operations.
- **Complete the transition of the joint command structure** to allow regional commanders to focus on strategic matters and to enable joint task force head-quarters to run ongoing operations.
- **Complete the effort to realign (and regularly re-evaluate) U.S. global military posture** to support new democracies, and counterterrorist and insurgent groups, deter and defeat regional adversaries, and dissuade security competition in Asia.
- **Foster new and stronger partnerships among the military services** to achieve greater strategic and operational depth and joint tactical proficiency.
- **Pursue an aggressive effort to develop and produce more-effective defenses against theater ballistic missiles and cruise missiles.**
- **Greatly expand the capacity and competence of forces devoted to combat advisory and training missions.**

Finally, while striving to fix what is broken, DoD should be careful not to break what is fixed. The U.S. armed forces are the most powerful and successful in the world, perhaps in history. Continued, selective investment in areas in which the United States currently excels will be needed alongside the new initiatives required to address the nation's emerging security problems. ∎

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